



Published September 2nd, 2020

Lafayette officials urge residents to register with CWS

By Nick Marnell



Prompted by public concern over the staggering number of lightning strikes on Aug. 17 and the ensuing major wildfires that tore through the Bay Area, Lafayette public agencies presented a detailed outline at the Aug. 26 public safety town hall of what steps the city has taken to help residents cope with emergency situations. But there was one step every speaker insisted that residents should do - and can only do - by themselves.

Assistant Fire Chief Will Pigeon of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District explained that the upstaffing of personnel, the rebuilt Fire Station 16 and the upgrades to district apparatus should help ConFire keep Lafayette safe this fire season - much as the district did during the two major fires that smothered the city in October.

Image courtesy Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office

As of May, the Lafayette Police Department had installed a network of 20 wildfire alert cameras in Contra Costa

and Alameda counties, according to Police Chief Ben Alldritt. "The cameras give fire management real-time notification of fire activity. We can tell immediately how many resources may be necessary to deploy," Pigeon said.

Officials presented other examples of what the city is doing to help the community prepare for emergencies, such as red flag warnings and public safety power shutoffs, but all town hall speakers encouraged members of the public to become their own first responders and register with the Contra Costa County Community Warning System.

CWS, a partnership of various public agencies, notifies residents via phone, text and email in case of an emergency. As Alldritt explained, Lafayette notifies residents of various city activities via social media, Nixle and CWS.

"Not all of the notifications delivered via social media or Nixle are emergencies. Those from CWS are," Alldritt said. "When that is activated, you've got to pay attention."

Before that can happen, residents must register with the program. "Make sure you register both your home and mobile phones," Pigeon said.

Residents can also register an email address, and emergency notifications will be sent via whatever formats are chosen. Duncan Seibert of the Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team advised that those with voice-over-internet phone lines be sure to register those numbers as well.

In 2019, Lafayette reported fewer than 3,000 residents registered with the CWS program. As of July, more than 8,100 active registrations were on file.

"With the level of engagement from the community lately - since it's a higher fire risk and the community in general is pretty engaged anyway - and the help from city officials, the Lafayette Police Department, CERT and ConFire to get the word out about registering for the CWS, Lafayette's registration numbers are excellent," said Heather Tiernan, CWS manager.

Subscribers should note that the program recently changed its caller ID. The new number is (925) 655-0195, and should be updated on the subscriber contact and favorite lists.

"Our CWS drill is one of the most efficient ways for families to take a role in a virtual evacuation exercise - wildfire or earthquake," Alldritt said.

The city had scheduled a CWS virtual evacuation for Aug. 29 but postponed the drill due to existing evacuations and continuing fires in the Bay Area.

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